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CONTROL: 1881
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TELEGRAM

INDICATE
☐ COLLECT
☐ CHARGE TO

File to

23-A 7

FROM AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES		CLASSIFICATION UNCLASSIFIED	
E.O. 11652: TAGS: SUBJECT: ACTION:		NA SHUM, PINS, PINT, AR RIOTING AT VILLA DEVOTO PRISON SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE AMEMBASSY ASUNCION AMEMBASSY BRASILIA AMEMBASSY MONTEVIDEO AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO UNCLASSIFIED BUENOS AIRES 1881	
AMB DCM POL3 POLR USIS ECOM XX SY RF CHRON		1. Rioting broke out this morning at Villa DeVoto prison in Buenos Aires. According to police sources the disturbances began at about 0820 when a number of regular criminal prisoners--as opposed to persons accused of subversion or other illegal political activities, according to official sources--started fires in one cell block (Pavilion seven of cell Block 2). The disturbance was quelled by about 1100 and fires extinguished. ² As of 1500 March 14, 70 persons had died of asphyxiation and burns and 30 more are critically injured. There	

ARGENTINA PROJECT (S200000044)
U.S. DEPT. OF STATE, A/RPS/IPS
Margaret P. Grafeld, Director
☒ Release () Excise () Deny
Exemption(s):
Declassify: () In Part () In Full
() Classify as () Extend as () Downgrade to
Date _____ Reason _____

DRAFTED BY: POL:WHHallman:gcr	DRAFTING DATE 3/14/78	TEL. EXT. 278	CONTENTS AND CLASSIFICATION APPROVED BY Ambassador Castro: [Signature]
CLEARANCES: SY:RKelly (in draft) [Signature] USIS:JHiggins (in draft) [Signature]			

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21F93, 49/52

161
[were ~~approximately 165~~ persons lodged in the cell block]
affected. Official sources describe persons taking part
as mostly young male "common criminals".

3. DeVoto's prisoner population is about 3,100,
according to police sources, of whom 614 are "female
terrorists". The remainder are described as common
criminals. (Embassy Comment: On February 4 the
Government issued a statement listing 702 persons
detained at DeVoto under "Poder Ejecutivo Nacional"--
27 of this number males. The total number of prisoners
interned for subversive activities is probably greater,
since persons already convicted or under judicial
process would not have been listed among PEN detainees.)
4. There follows below the full text of GOA's communique
Number 1 regarding the incident:

"On today's date, at 8:10 AM, when an inspection
was carried out in Ward No. 7 of the Detention Institute
of Buenos Aires City, where prisoners detained because
of common crime ~~petty offenses~~ are lodged, the latter
tried to take jail wardens by surprise, attacking them
with different weapons.

"As they could not succeed, the prisoners
pushed beds against the entrance to the ward and set
fire to the mattresses. This gave way to a fire that
encompassed practically the whole of the ward of 161
[prisoners. When the fire was put out it was possible]

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to enter the ward and it was found that there were dead and injured among the detainees; a list will be made available shortly.

"Due to the above mentioned circumstances H.E. the Minister of Justice of the Nation, Brigadier Auditor Julio Arnaldo Gómez, the National Director of the Federal Penitentiary Service, Col. Jorge Antonio Dotti, and top authorities of the institution arrived to the jail, and together with Federal Judge Dr. Guillermo Rivarola were able to ascertain that the dead and wounded did not show any bullet ~~wounds~~ wounds, and that they had been damaged by burns and asphyxia. Also it is to be clearly stated that none of the detainees at the disposal of the Executive Power had any participation in the above."

5. In contrast AP, UP and AFP stated in their reports that a number of prisoners were shot, and also reported that a certain number of prisoners had weapons and killed a guard. The same news agencies also reported that signal for the uprising was apparently given when two cars drove past the prison and opened fire.

6. ACTION REQUEST: Associated Press contacts at noon 3/14 told us they had been telexed a two-line advance of a story to be issued later today stating that State Department sources were reported to have said there

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